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**Title:** To live *with* the artificial or to live *as* the artificial? The essential human and the art of life

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**Keywords:** Homo technologicus; Homo aestheticus; Homo generator; philosophy of technology

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# To live *with* the artificial or to live *as* the artificial? The essential human and the art of life

Rasleen Kour<sup>1</sup> and Sreekumar Jayadevan<sup>2</sup>

## Abstract

Human beings are at the crossroads where technology can be used to transcend the limits of nature. In our search for who we essentially are, there are two possibilities at the ends of a spectrum: one, the technologicus, a complete technological being ideated by Kevin Warwick; the other, the aestheticus, a higher liberated being implied by Goethe available in the works of Herbert Marcuse. Should we find our essential nature by being more human or blend in with technology? We show that the current trend in philosophy of technology is predictively and politically inadequate to handle this question. Interestingly, Schirmacher crosses the traditional boundary between the subject and the object, and posits the generator that is quintessentially artificial. If we are artificial at our core, is achieving the aestheticus any more significant? We weigh both the technologicus and the aestheticus with the generator, and contemplate the possibilities towards finality.

**Keywords:** Homo technologicus; Homo aestheticus; Homo generator; philosophy of technology

## Introduction

We begin this article by restating the Sartrean<sup>3</sup> concern as follows: “everything has been figured out except for how to live *with technology*.” This worry is central to philosophy of technology. However, with the advent of mediation theory and postphenomenology, after the empirical turn in the late twentieth century, contemporary philosophy of technology

has turned (i) banally descriptive, (ii) politically vacuous, and (iii) predictively inefficacious.<sup>4</sup> It is banally descriptive because philosophers of technology analyse particular relations between individual human users (h) and specific technology (t). For example, in these analyses, we zoom into how the technology impacts the individual as well as how technology and the human being co-shape<sup>5</sup> each other. This leaves out the essential character of technology avail-

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<sup>3</sup> This is an allegedly Sartrean quote, “tout a étéprévu, sauf comment vivre”attributed to Sartre. Neither the French nor the English sources conclusively relate the authorship to Sartre.

<sup>4</sup> The three criticisms are from a series of writers, to name only a few: Kaplan, Feenberg, Schirmacher, and Ritter.

<sup>5</sup> Peter-Paul Verbeek, *Moralizing Technology*, (University of Chicago Press, 2011).

able in pre-empirical turn philosophy of technology where thinkers like Heidegger went on to define the essence of technology T which enframe (Gestell) us into ways of existence that are not necessarily authentic. Contemporary philosophy of technology is politically vacuous because empirical studies do not explicate the political aspects of technology. That is, the analyses of human-technology relations are myopic to the concerns of justice, race, or in general, the future of the human kind. In his retort, Kaplan vigorously opines: “Where is the analysis – any analysis! – of the social-political context in which technologies mediate human experience? Where is the discussion of the role of political agencies, institutions, social practices, economies, and other mediating forces in our lives?”<sup>6</sup> Finally, the pragmatic idea of enhancing human experiences by better understanding human-technology relations is also predictively ineffective. Here, the empirical turn merely describes the existing states of affairs about human-technology relations. It does not reveal what kind of technology the human being should root for. To achieve this direction, about a visionary future, studies in the philosophy of technology have to incorporate the essential human (H). In other words, in its understanding of particular human (h) and the interrelations with specific technology (t), contemporary philosophy of technology not only misses out the essential technology (T) but also the essential human (H). In line with this third criticism of contemporary philosophy of technology, and the

initial question about how to live with technology, this article aims at a predictive evaluation between various conceptions of human nature and future. Schirmacher, while working on his idea that technology is *Ereignis*, or *event*, poignantly mentions that “for over a hundred years modern philosophy of technology has sought and failed to reveal the identity of technology. Instead, it has all too often exhausted itself in the debates about civilization or in the accumulation of pseudo-knowledge resultant from micro-analyses.”<sup>7</sup> We believe that these “micro-analyses” cannot point to what we humans essentially “are” or “should be” so that we can live with technology.

It is evident that technology changes us. For example, in the incessant extension of human tasks to technology, Vallor demonstrates the ways in which we degenerate<sup>8</sup>, and deskill ourselves<sup>9</sup>. We no longer remember phone numbers of our friends, and in the near future we may make driving obsolete as autonomous vehicles no longer require us in the driving seat with controls. The idea of leaving work to machines had a motto of leisure and liberation behind it. If machines can help us conduct our mundane often monotonous and tedious jobs, we get more time for ourselves for our own enhancement.<sup>10</sup> However, instead of liberation, we fall into dependency, distractions, and mind-wandering. This is especially true in the case of artificial intelligence and big data. We are constantly ensnared in the world of entertainment, recommendations and options provided by the technological world.<sup>11</sup> Mar-

<sup>6</sup> David Kaplan, “What things still don’t do,” *Human Studies* 32, no.2 (June 2009): 236.

<sup>7</sup> Wolfgang Schirmacher, “Living in the event of technology,” *Inscriptions* 4, no. 1 (January 2021): 93.

<sup>8</sup> Danaher points out that it was Socrates who warned us against degeneration. In *Phaedrus*, Socrates was against writing as it would degenerate our memories. John Danaher, “Toward an ethics of AI assistants: an initial framework,” *Philosophy & Technology* 31, no. 4 (June 2018): 629–653.

<sup>9</sup> Shannon Vallor, *Technology and the virtues*, (Oxford University Press, 2016).

<sup>10</sup> Danaher claims that Alfred North Whitehead is a proponent in this direction. Whitehead believed that we should not use our minds unnecessarily for ordinary jobs. For him, the usage of the mind should be like ‘cavalry charges.’ They be used only when it’s of utmost importance and necessity. John Danaher, “Toward an ethics of AI assistants: an initial framework,” *Philosophy & Technology* 31, no. 4 (June 2018): 629–653.

<sup>11</sup> Schirmacher calls it another kind of outsourcing where media lives for us.

cuse's position may be reread given the present technological snare around us. He was an optimist, and believed that we can control<sup>12</sup> technology. In the following sections, we search for the essential human H, by contrasting two separate vantage points of the technologicus and the aestheticus. Further we evaluate these in light of Schirmacher's ideas, and pose the question whether there indeed exists an essential human as *it is in itself*? There have been several propositions such as homo faber, homo economicus, homo aestheticus, homo technologicus, and homo generator, to mention a few. Among these, we believe that the last three are pivotal in the context of this article as the faber and economicus have already sunk into obsolescence.

### **Technologicus: using technology for cognitive-neural enhancement**

For Warwick,<sup>13</sup> homo sapiens developed a new immune system with the aid of technology and evolved into homo-technologicus. Homo technologicus is a metaphorical organism that combines biology and technology and has undergone a new type of evolution in an entirely different environment. It gives rise to modern humans; rather than just homo sapiens, its offspring is "homo sapiens plus technology."<sup>14</sup> The concepts of cyborgs or posthumans better explicate homo-technologicus. Warwick asks the following questions: does dependency on any artifact qualify as being a cyborg? Is a cane-wielding blind woman a cyborg? Some have claimed that a cyborg cane gives a person assistance. Some have argued that a self-described

cyborg cane, akin to wearable computers or eyeglasses, can assist a blind person by giving her access to various information.<sup>15</sup> As a result of the multiple ways that people interact with technology, Warwick grouped these cases into four categories. Each time, a person's physical talents are enhanced to a new level, and they experience changes in their abilities, consciousness, and perception.

In Case 1, he takes the instances of technology positioned close to the human body, such as voice-activated firing mechanisms in a fighter pilot's helmet, or using a phone or tablet to complete any mundane task. In these cases, though technology places extra pressure on human brains, humans remain still homo sapiens and not homo technologicus. Sometimes technology is inserted into human bodies to make up for shortcomings. He gives the instances of hip replacements and heart pacemakers. Boundaries and limits turn complicated in this situation as well, yet it has no impact on the person's inherent individuality as he or she remains a biological organic consciousness. In Case 2, he cites instances where technology is inserted into a human body rather than the nervous system. An illustration is the RFID (Radio Frequency Identification Device) that Warwick placed into his arm. He could turn on the lights and open doors in a building just by passing through doorways. It empowers homo sapiens to transcend their natural limits. In this case, the implant is exterior to the brain and does not directly affect the person's cognitive ability. Since it does not affect their neurological cognitive nature, they will be regarded as a member of the homo sapien species. However, the situation becomes more challenging when technology is implanted in a human brain but not a human body. Warwick uses instances in

<sup>12</sup> Feenberg remarks that in general for critical theorists, technology is value-laden, and controllable. By value-ladenness, technology is taken to have effects on our values, behaviour and culture.

<sup>13</sup> Kevin Warwick, "Homo Technologicus: threat or opportunity?" *Philosophies* 1, no. 3 (October 2016): 199–208.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* 199.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* 199–200.

his Case 3 where there is a clear connection between the human brain and technology. Consider artificial intelligence and specific computer kinds that are employed in therapy. Deep brain stimulation is used to track the electrical activity in the brain during treatment for various diseases, including epilepsy, Parkinson's disease, and clinical depression. They create warning signals before the start of tremors using artificial intelligence and apply current signals to stop them. He gives the example of the Philip Kennedy-operable system, which allows paralysis patients to spell words by modifying their brain activity. Here, electronic signals are used to treat diseases like paralysis and depression by changing how the brain functions.

Case 4 provides an illustration that enables humans to excel above and beyond what is normal for them. Warwick tested the bi-directional capabilities of the *BrainGate* multi-electrode on himself and his wife in 2002. It enables telegraphic communication between two human nervous systems (Warwick and his wife). This trial demonstrates its value for people who are blind or suffer from a specific type of motor neuron disease. Warwick mentions Alan Turing who asserted that modern intelligent devices have improved traits over those of human beings, which is of course a type of cognitive extension. Many talents of an individual can be enhanced if the human brain is connected to a computer, including quick math, internet knowledge, memories that were not originally theirs, many dimensions of the brain, and transmitting impulses from one brain to another. These qualities justify raising the status of homo sapiens to homo technologicus because we have tweaked, enhanced or altered the natural neuronal-cognitive capabilities. Warwick cites Turing again: "may not machines carry out something which ought to be described as thinking but which is very differ-

ent from what a man does?"<sup>16</sup> This new homo technologicus will combine human and technological advancements and possess all-natural abilities unknown to the first homo sapiens. As a result, in Case 4, the human brain is connected directly to the computer's brain to enhance homo sapiens beyond its normal state. The Warwick experiment demonstrates the applicability of this improvement even though this is a future direction at this moment.

## **Aestheticus: using technology to emancipate the senses**

In his novel *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, Goethe portrays life as an active process of growth and evolution rather than a static state. Goethe's novel represents the idea of "homo aestheticus," which states that humans have an inbuilt propensity for aesthetic experience and appreciation. Even though Marcuse himself did not use the term "homo aestheticus," one may see that his idea of the essentially aesthetic human captures it, where the individual liberates herself from false needs and alienated labour. In Goethe's novel, Wilhelm, the main character persistently looks for his identity and reason for existing, eventually finding his "true self." He articulates the real meaning of human spirit development (inward and outward), which is undoubtedly influenced by nature. According to Goethe, the development of the human soul is comparable to how botanists envision a plant, which is a symbol of all vegetative forms. Goethe's novel addresses the relevance of biological discussion for literary and aesthetic practice because in the nineteenth century when it was written, the life sciences were just taking off. The subsequent usage of the term by Dissanayake<sup>17</sup> denotes that aesthetics and the arts are vital to every human's evolutionary adaptation. Appreciating beauty is essential to

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 205.

<sup>17</sup> Ellen Dissanayake, *Homo Aestheticus*, (London and Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995).

human nature and shapes how people perceive the environment. It is a means of leading a more purposeful and happy life.

Thinkers in the past have argued for an aesthetic release or liberation for human beings from the clutches of natural forces. Schopenhauer, for example, believed that music can help humans fight against the fundamental force of nature (the Will) and make us will-less. For Schopenhauer, the biological human *as it is* easily succumbs to the Will. A better yet self-imposed pessimistic life that negates the Will offers consolation in existence. Though evidently disparate, Marcuse puts forth a vision of finality to human beings which addresses the concern of how to live with technology. For him, there is a way to live with technology. The aesthetic release or liberation is not from the Will in nature, but from the totalizing effects of technology and repression in advanced industrial society. In *One Dimensional Man*, he portrays the effects of technology: “Today, domination perpetuates and extends itself not only through technology but as technology.”<sup>18</sup> However, technophobia did not enter into his works. He wanted to regulate and deliver technology in such a way that human beings are freer. “Technological rationality, stripped of its exploitative features, is the sole standard and guide in planning and developing the available resources for all.”<sup>19</sup> However, the endeavor of Marcuse might seem utopian and overly ambitious. For example, his student Feenberg remarks that “his [Marcuse’s] startling late theory of sensation looks like an attempt to re-enchant the disenchanted nature of modernity.”<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, Marcuse is equally aware that some alienated labour in society is necessary for

it to sustain. For Marcuse, the works of young Marx paves an authentic picture about division of labour and estrangement. In the *Grundrisse*, for example, Marx comments that in the capitalist world, “labour cannot become play.”<sup>21</sup> For Marx, division of labour creates estrangement and takes away the organic and creative fulfillments of human beings. In Marx’s early writings, he makes it clear that “the worker feels himself at home only when he is not working.”<sup>22</sup> Building on Marx’s thoughts, for Marcuse, a path to liberation is available by using technology to free the human from estrangement.

Regulating and controlling technology does not lead to complete cessation of meaningless alienated work. He reiterates that Marx never believed that alienated labour can once and for all be abrogated. “Alienated labour as such can never be abrogated. There will always have to be persons who adjust machines, who read gauges or whatever it is. So, alienated labour, and Marx said this, can never be entirely abrogated. But it can be reduced quantitatively and qualitatively so that it’s no longer a full-time occupation to which the individual is bound during his or her entire personal and social life.”<sup>23</sup> Therefore, he continually stresses on the reduction of physical and mental toil in advanced industrial society.

Feenberg believes that Marcuse took arts in the sense of a way of life, as in the art of life; where one figures out how to live. This is closer to the ancient Greek conception of philosophy where, other than its armchair academic styles, philosophy is an attempt to find a way to live. Feenberg repeats that for Marcuse, “the role of the arts is to bring existence to its essential

<sup>18</sup> Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), 162.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* 256.

<sup>20</sup> Andrew Feenberg, *Heidegger and Marcuse*, (London: Routledge, 2005), 83.

<sup>21</sup> Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, trans. Martin Nicolaus, 631.

<sup>22</sup> Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1959), 31.

<sup>23</sup> Larry Hartwick, “On ‘The Aesthetic Dimension’: a conversation with Herbert Marcuse,” *Contemporary Literature* 22, no. 4, Marxism and the Crisis of the World (Autumn 1981): 416–424.

form. Implicit in every art is a finality corresponding to the perfection of its objects.”<sup>24</sup> In this interpretation, governments and education all have an art<sup>25</sup> as its purpose. The only worry for Marcuse was that modern technology does not find such an objective in advanced industrial societies. Technology controls and affects us but there is no clear finality to technology itself. In other words, we do not have an art of technology, or an objective or purpose with technology.

In addition to Feenberg’s claim about Marcuse’s use of the “aesthetic” as the art of living which is perhaps preferable but quite permissive, Marcuse hints that he uses the “aesthetic” in the sense of “sensibility of human being,”<sup>26</sup> or as a discipline of sensibility. This is the typical usage in line with Kant before the term specifically started to pick out particular arts such as painting or sculpture. For Marcuse, “aesthetic” does not pertain to the specific forms of arts. Further, he believes that the aesthetic as the sensibility of the human being has a political dimension. In other words, the art of life is in changing the sensibility. That is, we all have false needs conditional to the socio-historical contexts in which we are in. These false needs could also be stimulating such as the ones in capitalistic societies. However, in order to emancipate the senses, one needs to essentially see freedom as a sensuous but real need. He makes it very clear that this is not a romantic return to pre-industrial age but a life with technology without false sensibilities. It is clear that he visualizes the human being as a biological, libidinal entity that is constantly in conflict with its rational side. Given that Marcuse addresses freedom within eros, can we ask how technology can help us to be truly aesthetic?

## **Generator: living as the artificial by taking responsibility**

In the preceding two sections, the problem of how to live with technology presupposes a dualist vantage point where we strictly separate humans and technology. In Warwick, technology is attached to us to enhance our abilities, and in Marcuse, it is used to free us to attain an aesthetic dimension. Therefore, living with technology necessitates a subject-object duality between us and technology. For Schirmacher, humans are already artificial! Humans live *as* the artificial rather than “with the artificial.” It is a misnomer to say that the human being is naturally artificial, but that’s what Schirmacher means. At its core, for Schirmacher, the homo is a *generator*, something that creates life techniques by participating in the event of technology. For Schirmacher, there is no subject-object duality between the human and the artificial. Therefore, the whole discussion about “using” technology to achieve something is beyond his language. However, for him, we are responsible for the lives we affect. Therefore, even if we become a technological composite in the future and outsource alienated labour completely, the way of life is a result of openness and autonomous decisions, as a result, we should take responsibility for the experiences we face.

Schirmacher and Theisen<sup>27</sup> suggest that to comprehend what we are doing to other species and the environment, we must be accountable for our successes and failures. They contend that to understand the potential of life, love, and joy of life, we must first face death. It is evident according to Schirmacher that those who have AIDS understand the artificiality of

<sup>24</sup> Feenberg also maintains that Marcuse understood truth in a non-propositional way, similar to how the Ancient Greeks pursued it. Andrew Feenberg, *Heidegger and Marcuse*, (London: Routledge, 2005), 86.

<sup>25</sup> Governments make people just; art of education is in churning out rationality in individuals. *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Herbert Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1977), 9

<sup>27</sup> Wolfgang Schirmacher and Daniel Theisen. “Ethics and artificiality.” *Inscriptions* 1, no. 1 (July 2018): 11.

human life and the responsibility that no theory can ever explain. The confidence in living eternally, as well as all future calculations and plans, disappear in the face of death. It demonstrates how artificiality permeates ethics. Schirmacher asserts that the “artificial” is degraded in today’s usage to the opposite of “natural.” In our common understanding, we rarely question the validity that we are biological organisms with natural dispositions. We have changed the face of the earth and ourselves, and yet mistakenly search for our essence in the “natural.” In other words, when we contrast the term “artificial” with “natural,” in a certain sense, we usually find affinity with the later. For Schirmacher, this is a folly. One may consider this as a historical fallacy with which a truism has been falsely narrated that *we are natural*, or that our ways of living is substantially natural, but evidence portrays a different picture. Schirmacher challenges this truism, and considers the human as a being that is essentially artificial in all aspects of life. Nonetheless, the worry Schirmacher expresses is not the mere fact that humans are artificial, but the fact that in altering their ways, humans “pass off responsibility.” Schirmacher exposes the human species in the modern world with all of its hypocrisy. He demonstrates this with the example of laboratory testing on animals that we have already done enough damage by not treating ourselves as artificial.

For Schirmacher, as artificial beings, we have affected the lives of countless species. Therefore, ethics in the normative sense is uncalled for. He prefers to have an art of life that is open and equips us with a sense of responsibility whenever we play with the world through our artificiality. This is possible only if we dispel the idea that we are “natural.” Since the artificial is ingrained in human beings, the search for a natural aesthetic dimension or an extended technological dimension seems mean-

ingless. This is why both the technologicus and the aestheticus occupy a different ontology in comparison with Schirmacher’s philosophy. With regard to the purpose or finality, neither the seamless integration with technology, nor the emancipation of the senses counts as valid directions unless we owe responsibility for changing our world.

Below (in Table 1), we expose these conceptions in a methodical manner:

Essential H	Technologicus: a hybrid with non-biological components.	Aestheticus: a biological being who may use technology to attain an aesthetic dimension.	Generator: a being that is artificial, and independent of any organic biological component.
Ontology	human-technology synthesis, but maintains that humans and technology are ontologically distinct.	Organic. Maintains human-technology distinction.	Human-technology synthesis, or subject object continuum.
Finality	Seamless enhancement of neural-cognitive prowess.	Removal of false needs, alienated labour.	Unfolding of ways of life.
Essential T	Instrument, a tool.	Deterministic yet controllable.	<i>Ereignis</i> , an event

Table 1

## Conclusion

For Warwick, homo sapiens is withdrawing into an archaic history that may remain perhaps as a museum piece in the distant future. On the other hand, Marcuse speaks of the case of a higher human who uses technology for attaining the aesthetic dimension. In a strict sense, Marcuse considers the human being as a biological organism with an incessant libidinal energy that is at war with its own rational self and the structures of repressions.<sup>28</sup> By using technology, the higher aesthetic being liberates itself from the structures of repressions. Marcuse imagines a human who is devoid of any internal consciousness-altering technology, and therefore, Warwick’s technologicus

<sup>28</sup> Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955).

<sup>29</sup> Marcuse wrote extensively on man’s relationship with nature. He was also preoccupied with nature’s freedom. However, we set these ideas aside given the constraints of space.

is something that Marcuse would have never endorsed.<sup>29</sup> Warwick only provides a sketch of the technologicus, thus laying open all the political and ethical questions on how to live. There is a possibility that the technologicus can become the aestheticus. It is fairly simple for Marcuse. The technologicus will be important for him only if it frees itself from alienated labour. In Case 4, the neural-cognitive structure is enhanced. So far, if we presume that the eros dimension of the homo is still intact, Marcuse would accept the technologicus. This is crucial for Marcuse because without eros, the aestheticus is impossible. However, the question is- should we get into a stage of complete independence from work and engage in intellectual, cognitive, introspective, creative expressions alone? Isn't the human at its core a social animal who likes to interact, love, and care for each other? One may argue that the technologicus, as laid out by Warwick, is by no means diminishing these potentials. It is only that the interaction, care etc. are all mediated through its extended enhanced network. If the technologicus can help satisfy the eros dimension, then perhaps there is an avenue to consider it as the aestheticus. For example, virtual reality and seemingly infinite roles one can potentially undertake replaces the real as it is in itself. Here, the individual is immersed in a virtual world satisfying the sensual needs because the difference between the real feeling and artificially created feeling is blurred. For Schirmacher, these are new lives lived through technologies. Now, to read Schirmacherian visions into Marcuse and Warwick, the natural aesthetic being is problematic. This is because the human being was never natural at the first place. The generator can, however, be a technological hybrid and surpass alienated labour to find the art of life. Human being for Schirmacher, as if in play creating endless ways of life, extends existence to mediums. The key question is not whether the generator is ontologically capable of being a technologicus or an

aestheticus. It is that in choosing the future as an aestheticus or as a technologicus, the generator has to owe responsibility as both directions are ways of unfolding different types of subjective experiences, and may involve suffering of other species and impacts on the environment.

## Authors' contributions

Rasleen Kour and Sreekumar Jayadevan contributed equally to the conceptualisation, planning, research and writing of this paper.

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